

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1263

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK, EI

SUBJECT: GROWTH OF THE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1. CONGEN INFORMED ONE REASON FOR CURRENT TRIP TO NORTH AMERICA OF REVEREND IAN PAISLEY IS TO PARTICIPATE IN FORMAL OPENINGS FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES IN CANADA. THERE ALSO ONE CONGREGATION AT MOANGHAN IN REPUBLIC IRELAND OPENED BY PAISLEY IN MAY 1975. LATEST PROOF OF GROWTH IS DETERMINATION BY BBC THAT THERE 10,000 FREE PRESBYTERIANS ONE-HALF OF ONE PER CENT OF POPULATION. BBC RADIO, USING THIS COUNT, HAS DETERMINED CHURCH ENTITLED TO OCCASIONAL BROADCAST AND DESPITE OPPOSITION, INTENDS BROADCAST A PAISLEY SERMON MAY 30.

2. PHENOMENAL GROWTH OF FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN NORTHERN IRELAND COINCIDES WITH GROWTH ITS "POLITICAL BRANCH" THE DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY (DUP). FREE PRESBYTERIAN CLERGY FORM LEADERSHIP NUCLEAU OF DUP.

3. REVEREND WILLIAM MC CREA AND CONGREGATION MAGHERAFELT COUNTY LONDONDERRY IS ILLUSTRATIVE THIS GROWTH. MC CREA, AS MANY OTHER FREE PRESBYTERIAN (FP) MINISTERS IS QUITE YOUNG. HE APPEARS BE LATE TEENAGER BUT IS PROBABLY 30. MC CREA BORN COUNTY TYRONE AND ACCREDITED IN FP INSTITUTION BELFAST. HE
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HAS BUILT MAGHERAFELT CONGREGATION FROM 30 IN 1968 TO MORE

THAN 300 TODAY. THESE RECRUITS LARGELY FROM METHODIST, PRESBYTERIAN AND BAPTIST CONGREGATIONS. FROM HIS HOME AND POSSESSIONS IT OBVIOUS VIEW OF POVERTY NOT INTEGRAL PART OF FP ORDINATION.

4. MC CREA IS SOLE FP MEMBER ON MAGHERAFELT DISTRICT COUNCIL. DESPITE THIS, DURING PAST TWO YEARS HE HAS SUCCEEDED IN MOVING COUNCIL TOWARD SUNDAY CLOSING OF ALL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES IN DISTRICT. HE IS CHAIRMAN OF ASSOCIATION OF UNIONIST COUNCILORS, A POSITION OF CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE THROUGHOUT PROVINCE. IN FEBRUARY HE REPLACED REVEREND WILLIAM BEATTIE AS CHAIRMAN DUP, PLACING MC CREA SECOND ONLY TO PAISLEY IN PARTY LEADERSHIP.

5. THERE OBVIOUS ADVANTAGES IN DUAL POLITICAL/SPIRITUAL ROLE IN ULSTER. FUNDAMENTALIST RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE NEATLY MESHERS WITH FUNDAMENTALIST POLITICAL ORTHODOXY. IN ULSTER CALVINISTIC SUSPICION OF ROME MERGES INTO SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL DISTRUST OF DUBLIN. IT FAIR TO SAY START OF FREE PRESBYTERIANS/DEMOCRATIC UNIONISTS COINCIDED WITH BEGINNING ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT. DESPITE CERTAIN INCONSISTENCIES (OFFICIAL UNIONIST JOHN TAYLOR ONCE TOLD A DUP CONVENTION MEMBER THAT ONLY ROMAN CATHOLICS AND FREE PRESBYTERIANS ELECTED A LEADER FOR LIFE) THERE SEEMS TO BE BROAD AND GROWING SUPPORT FOR PAISLEY AND COMPANY, RENDERED FOR GOD AND CAESAR ALIKE. THE MOVEMENT IS NOT COMPLETELY MONOLITHIC HOWEVER AND SOME NEWSMEN BELIEVE PART OF PAISLEY "EXTREMISM" IS DUE TO NECESSITY "LOOK OVER HIS SHOULDER", PARTICULARLY AT MC CREA.
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